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THE FIFTH VEDA

Among the errors that are specifically modern, which we have often had occasion to denounce, one of those that most directly opposes any true understanding of traditional doctrines is what might be called "historicism," which is, moreover, at bottom nothing more than a simple consequence of the "evolutionist" mentality: it consists, in fact, in supposing that all things must have begun in the most rudimentary and gross manner, then undergone from there a progressive elaboration, such that this or that conception would have appeared at a determined moment, and all the later insofar as it is judged to be of a higher order, this implying that it can only be "the product of an already advanced civilization," according to an expression that has become so common that it is sometimes repeated almost mechanically by those very people who try to react against such a mentality, but who have only "traditionalist" intentions without any real traditional knowledge.

To this way of seeing things, it is appropriate to oppose clearly the affirmation that, on the contrary, it is at the origin that everything belonging to the spiritual and intellectual domain is found in a state of perfection, from which it has thereafter only gradually moved away in the course of the "obscuration" that necessarily accompanies every cyclical process of manifestation; this fundamental law, which we must be content to recall here without entering into more extensive developments, obviously suffices to reduce to nothing all the results of so-called "historical criticism."

One may further note that the latter implies a firmly established bias to deny any supra-human element, to treat traditional doctrines themselves in the manner of a purely human "thought," entirely comparable in this respect to what profane philosophy and sciences are; from this point of

view also, no compromise is possible, and moreover it is in reality this profane “thought” itself that is of very recent date, having been able to appear only as “the product of an already advanced degeneration,” we might say by turning back in an “anti-evolutionist” sense the phrase we cited earlier.

If we apply these general considerations to the Hindu tradition, we shall say that, contrary to the opinion of the orientalists, there exists nothing such as what is called “Vedism,” “Brahmanism,” and “Hinduism,” if one understands by that doctrines which would have arisen at successive periods and would have replaced one another, each of them being characterized by conceptions essentially different from those of the others, if not even more or less in contradiction with them, conceptions which would thus have formed successively as the result of a “reflection” imagined on the model of simple philosophical speculation.

These various designations, if one insists on retaining them, must be regarded only as designating one and the same tradition, to which they can all indeed apply; and at most one may say that each relates more directly to a certain aspect of this tradition, the different aspects moreover being closely linked and in no way able to be isolated from one another. This results immediately from the fact that the tradition in question is, in principle, contained integrally in the Veda, and that, consequently, everything that is contrary to the Veda or is not legitimately derived from it is thereby excluded from this tradition, under whatever aspect one may consider it; the essential unity and invariability of the doctrine are thus ensured, whatever may otherwise be the developments and adaptations to which it may give rise in order to respond more particularly to the needs and aptitudes of the men of this or that epoch.

It must indeed be clearly understood that the immutability of the doctrine in itself does not stand in the way of any development or any adaptation, on the sole condition that they always be in strict conformity with the principles, but also, at the same time, that nothing of all this ever constitutes “novelties,” since in any case it can only be a matter of

an “explicitation” of what the doctrine had always implied, or again of a formulation of the same truths in different terms in order to render them more easily accessible to the mentality of a more “obscured” epoch.

What could at first be grasped immediately and without difficulty in the principle itself, men of later epochs no longer knew how to see there, apart from exceptional cases, and it was then necessary to make up for this general lack of understanding by a detail of explanations and commentaries that until then had been in no way necessary; moreover, aptitudes for arriving directly at pure knowledge becoming ever rarer, it was necessary to open other “paths” employing means more and more contingent, following in a certain way, in order to remedy this as far as possible, the “descent” that was being accomplished from age to age in the course of the cycle of terrestrial humanity.

Thus, one might say, the latter received, in order to attain its transcendent ends, facilities all the greater as its spiritual and intellectual level lowered further, in order to save all that could still be saved, taking into account the conditions inevitably determined by the law of the cycle.

It is by these considerations that one can truly understand the place occupied, in the Hindu tradition, by what is usually designated by the name of “Tantrism,” insofar as it represents the ensemble of teachings and means of “realization” more especially appropriate to the Kali-Yuga. It would therefore be entirely erroneous to see in it a doctrine apart, and all the more so some kind of “system,” as Westerners are always too inclined to do; in truth, it is much rather a certain “spirit,” if one may express it thus, which, in a more or less diffuse way, permeates the entire Hindu tradition in its present form, such that it would be almost impossible to assign to it, within that tradition, precise and well-defined limits.

Moreover, if one considers that the beginning of the Kali-Yuga goes back far beyond so-called “historical” times, one will have to recognize that the very origin of Tantrism, far from being as “late” as some claim,

necessarily escapes the restricted means available to profane investigation. And yet, when we speak here of origin, by making it coincide with that of the Kali-Yuga itself, this is only half true; more precisely, it is true only on the condition of specifying that it is only Tantrism as such that is meant, that is to say, insofar as it is the expression or exterior manifestation of something which, like everything else in the tradition, existed from the beginning in the Veda itself, although it was only formulated more explicitly and developed in its applications when circumstances came to require it.

One thus sees that there is here a double point of view to be considered: on the one hand, one can find Tantrism even in the Veda, since it is included there in principle; but, on the other hand, it can properly be named, as a distinct aspect of the doctrine, only from the moment when it was "explicated" for the reasons we have indicated, and it is in this sense only that it must be considered as particular to the Kali-Yuga.

The designation of what is at issue comes from the fact that the teachings which form its basis are expressed in treatises that bear the generic name of Tantras, a name that has a direct relation with the symbolism of weaving of which we have spoken on other occasions, for, in the proper sense, tantra is the "warp" of a fabric; and we have pointed out that, elsewhere also, one finds words of the same meaning applied to the sacred Books.

These Tantras are often regarded as forming a "fifth Veda," specially destined for the men of the Kali-Yuga; and this would be completely unjustified if they were not, as we have just explained, derived from the Veda understood in its most rigorous acceptation, by way of adaptation to the conditions of a determined epoch. It is moreover important to consider that in reality the Veda is one, in principle and in a certain way "intemporally," before having become triple, then quadruple in its formulation; if it can also be quintuple in the present age, due to the additional developments required by faculties of understanding that are less "open" and can no longer exercise themselves as directly in the order of pure intellectuality, it is evident that this does not affect its

primary unity any more, which is essentially its “perpetual” aspect (sanātana), therefore independent of the particular conditions of any age whatsoever.

The doctrine of the Tantras is therefore, and can only be in sum, a normal development, according to certain points of view, of what is already contained in the Veda, since it is in this, and in this alone, that it can be, as it is in fact, an integral part of the Hindu tradition; and, as for the means of “realization” (sādhana) prescribed by the Tantras, one can indeed say that, by that very fact, they too are legitimately derived from the Veda, since they are at bottom nothing other than the application and the effective implementation of this same doctrine.

If these means, among which one must naturally include, whether as principal or simply accessory, rites of every kind, nonetheless appear to take on a certain character of “novelty” in relation to those that preceded them, it is because there was no reason to envisage them in earlier epochs, except perhaps as pure possibilities, since men then had no need of them and disposed of other means that suited their nature better.

There is here something entirely comparable to what is the special development of a traditional science at this or that epoch, a development that does not constitute any more a spontaneous “appearance” or any kind of “innovation,” since in this case also it can never really be a matter of anything other than an application of principles, therefore of something that had in them at least an implicit pre-existence, and that it was always possible, consequently, to make explicit at any moment, provided there was some reason to do so; but precisely this reason is found in fact only in the contingent circumstances that condition a determined epoch.

Now, that the strictly “Vedic” rites, we mean such as they were “at the beginning,” are no longer presently practicable, this results only too clearly from the sole fact that the soma, which plays a capital role in them, has been lost for a time that it is impossible to evaluate “historically”; and it is well understood that, when we speak here of the

soma, this must be considered as representing an entire ensemble of things whose knowledge, at first manifest and accessible to all, has become hidden in the course of the cycle, at least for ordinary humanity.

It was therefore necessary that there should henceforth be for these things "substitutes" which necessarily could be found only in an order inferior to theirs, which amounts to saying that the "supports" by which a "realization" remained possible became more and more "materialized" from one epoch to another, in conformity with the descending course of cyclical development; a relation such as that of wine to the soma, as regards their ritual use, could serve here as a symbolic example.

This "materialization" must moreover not be understood simply in the most restricted and ordinary sense of the word; as we envisage it, it begins to occur, one might say, as soon as one leaves pure knowledge, which alone is also pure spirituality; and the appeal to elements of a sentimental or volitional order, for example, is not one of the least signs of such a "materialization," even if these elements are employed in a legitimate way, that is to say, if they are taken only as means subordinated to an end that always remains knowledge, since, if it were otherwise, one could no longer in any way speak of "realization," but only of a deviation, a simulacrum, or a parody, all things which, it goes without saying, are rigorously excluded by traditional orthodoxy, under whatever form and at whatever level one may envisage it.

What we have just indicated applies exactly to Tantrism, whose "path," in a general way, appears as more "active" than "contemplative," or, in other terms, as situated rather on the side of "power" than on that of knowledge; and a particularly significant fact, in this respect, is the importance it gives to what is designated as the "path of the hero" (vīra-mārga).

It is evident that vīrya, a term equivalent to the Latin virtus, at least according to the acceptation that the latter had before having been diverted in a "moral" sense by the Stoics, properly expresses the essential and in some way "typical" quality, not of the Brāhmaṇa, but of

the Kṣatriya; and the vīra is distinguished from the paśu, that is to say from the being subjected to the bonds of common existence, less by an effective knowledge than by a voluntary affirmation of "autonomy," which, at this stage, can still, depending on the use he will make of it, divert him from the goal as well as lead him to it.

The danger, in fact, is here that "power" be sought for itself and thus become an obstacle instead of a support, and that the individual come to take himself as his own end; but it goes without saying that this is only deviation and abuse, which never result in the final analysis from anything other than an incomprehension for which the doctrine cannot in any way be held responsible; and, moreover, what we have just said concerns only the "path" as such, not the goal which, in reality, let us insist again, is always the same and can in no case be anything other than knowledge, since it is only by it and in it that the being truly "realizes" himself in all his possibilities.

It is nonetheless true that the means proposed to attain this goal are marked, as they inevitably must be, by the special characters of the Kali-Yuga: one should remember, in this regard, that the proper role of the "hero" is everywhere and always represented as a "quest," which, if it can be crowned with success, also risks leading to failure; and the "quest" itself supposes that there is, when the "hero" appears, something that has been lost previously and that it is for him to rediscover; this task, at the end of which the vīra will become divya, can be defined, if one wishes, as the search for the soma or for the "drink of immortality" (amṛta), which is moreover, from the symbolic point of view, the exact equivalent of what was in the West the "quest of the Grail"; and, by the soma rediscovered, the end of the cycle rejoins its beginning in the "intemporal."

TANTRISM AND MAGIC

It is customary in the West to attribute to Tantrism a "magical" character, or at least to believe that magic plays a predominant role in it; there is here an error of interpretation concerning Tantrism, and perhaps also concerning magic, about which our contemporaries generally have only extremely vague and confused ideas, as we have shown in one of our recent articles.

We shall not return here to this latter point; but, taking magic strictly in its proper sense, and supposing that it is indeed understood thus, we shall only ask what, in Tantrism itself, can give rise to this false interpretation, for it is always more interesting to explain an error than to confine oneself to its pure and simple observation.

First of all, we shall recall that magic, however inferior it may be in itself, is nonetheless an authentic traditional science; as such, it can legitimately have a place among the applications of an orthodox doctrine, provided that it is only the subordinate and very secondary place that suits its essentially contingent character.

On the other hand, given that the effective development of particular traditional sciences is in fact determined by the conditions proper to this or that epoch, it is natural and in a certain way normal that the most contingent among them should develop especially in the period where humanity is the farthest removed from pure intellectuality, that is to say in the Kali-Yuga, and that thus they should there take on, while remaining within the limits assigned to them by their very nature, an importance that they could never have had in earlier periods.

Traditional sciences, whatever they may be, can always serve as "supports" for rising to a higher-order knowledge, and it is this, more than what they are in themselves, that confers upon them a properly doctrinal value; but, as we have said elsewhere, such "supports," in a general way, must become more and more contingent as the cyclical

“descent” is accomplished, in order to remain adapted to the human possibilities of each epoch.

The development of inferior traditional sciences is therefore in sum only a particular case of this necessary “materialization” of “supports” of which we have spoken; but at the same time, it goes without saying that the dangers of deviation become all the greater as one goes further in this direction, and this is why a science such as magic is manifestly among those that most easily give rise to all sorts of deformations and illegitimate uses; deviation, in all cases, is moreover imputable in the final analysis only to the very conditions of this period of “obscuration” that is the Kali-Yuga.

It is easy to understand the direct relation that all these considerations have with Tantrism, a doctrinal form specially adapted to the Kali-Yuga; and if one adds that, as we have indicated elsewhere, Tantrism insists very particularly on “power” as a means and even as a possible basis of “realization,” one will not be surprised that it must thereby grant a fairly considerable importance—one might even say the maximum importance compatible with their relativity—to sciences which, in one way or another, are capable of contributing to the development of this “power” in some domain.

Magic being evidently among these, it is in no way a question of contesting its place; but what must be stated clearly is that it can in no way constitute the essential of Tantrism: to cultivate magic for itself, just as moreover to take for goal the study or the production of “phenomena” of any kind whatsoever, is to enclose oneself in illusion instead of tending to free oneself from it; this is nothing but deviation, and consequently it is no longer Tantrism, an aspect of an orthodox tradition and a “path” destined to lead the being to true “realization.”

One readily recognizes that there is a tantric initiation, but most often without realizing what is really implied by that; everything we have expounded on many occasions concerning the spiritual ends that are those of every regular initiation without any exception dispenses us

from insisting at length on this point.

Magic as such, referring exclusively to the “psychic” domain by definition itself, has assuredly nothing initiatic; therefore, even if it happens that an initiatic ritual makes use of certain apparently “magical” elements, it will necessarily be the case that, by the goal it assigns to them and by the manner in which it employs them in conformity with this goal, it “transforms” them into something of an entirely different order, where the “psychic” will no longer be anything more than a simple “support” of the spiritual; and thus it is no longer at all magic that is involved there in reality, any more than, for example, it is a matter of geometry when one ritually traces a yantra.

The “support” taken in its “materiality,” if one may express it thus, must never be confused with the higher-order character that is essentially conferred upon it by its destination. This confusion can only be the fact of superficial observers, incapable of seeing anything beyond the most exterior formal appearances, which is indeed the case of almost all those who, in the modern West, have wished to concern themselves with these things, and who have always brought to them all the incomprehension inherent in the profane mentality; it is moreover this same confusion which, let us note in passing, is likewise at the starting point of the “naturalist” interpretations they have claimed to give of all traditional symbolism.

To these few observations, we shall add yet another of a somewhat different character: one knows the importance of the tantric elements that have penetrated certain forms of Buddhism, those that are comprised under the general designation of Mahāyāna; but, far from being only a “corrupted” Buddhism, as it is customary to say in the West, these forms represent on the contrary the result of a veritable “rectification” of Buddhism in a traditional and orthodox sense.

That in certain cases one can scarcely speak there of Buddhism except in a kind of “nominal” way matters little; or rather, if one envisages Buddhism properly so called as a specifically heterodox doctrine, this

itself only testifies to the full extent of the “rectification” that has thus been carried out.

One may then pose this question: how could such a thing possibly have been the work of Tantrism, if the latter were truly nothing more or other than magic? There is here a perfectly evident impossibility for anyone who has the slightest knowledge of traditional realities; this is, at bottom, only the very impossibility that the inferior produce the superior, or that the “more” come out of the “less”; but is not this absurdity precisely that which is implied in all the “evolutionist” thought of modern Westerners, and which thereby contributes, for a large part, to irremediably falsifying all their conceptions?